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ABSTRACT

Given the need for students with disabilities to acquire citizenship skills similar to those of their peers, this study explores and describes the understanding of selected civic competencies found in students of inclusive social studies classes and how they acquired this understanding. First, the study explores whether or not the level of understanding is significantly similar between students with disabilities and general education students in inclusive classrooms, thus supporting the philosophical underpinnings of inclusion in a democratic society. Second, the study describes the sources responsible for student understanding of these civic competencies with the goal of determining similarities and differences in these students' sources of knowledge. A test of civic competencies was developed for a basis of comparison, and a descriptive analysis of students' self-reported sources for understanding civic competencies was conducted. Participants included 32 students with disabilities and 474 general education students, all of whom attended 3 high schools in Iowa. The study included only those students who were present in inclusive classrooms. Findings suggest that students with disabilities did not fare as well as their general education peers on a test of civic competencies. Hispanic students, compared with white students, comprised the only ethnic group to show a significantly lower understanding of civic competencies as per the test of civic competencies. Three sources of knowledge (curriculum, parents, and peers) emerged as similar for all groups of students. (Contains a figure, 3 tables, and 21 references.) (BT)

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Civic Competencies and Students With Disabilities

Schooling in all societies purports to teach students the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function as responsible citizens. In a democratic society, schools translate these curricular goals into knowledge of the community, nation, and world; skills required to participate competently within the larger society and to promote and to protect one's interests; and the democratic attitudes that form the bases for decisions to act on one's behalf and within the larger context of the common good.

In a pluralistic democracy such as the United States, fulfilling these goals through public schooling is an onerous task. The 1975 passage of Public Law 94-142--originally titled the Education of All Handicapped Children Act and re-titled in 1990 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)--poses an additional challenge to these stated goals. The 1997 re-authorization of IDEA places much more emphasis on its "least restrictive environment" provision and adds impetus for increased efforts at inclusion of students with special needs (Yell & Shriner, 1997).

Thus, students with disabilities are increasingly enrolled in regular education classrooms and must be taught the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to lead fully equitable and participatory lives in this society (Coleman & Vaughn, 2000). One measure of success or failure in fulfilling this charge is whether or not these included special needs students have the knowledge and ability to participate actively in society. Enactment of these skills, more

commonly known as civic competencies (Martorella, 1996), determines the level to which one can lead a full, productive, and contributory life in our democracy.

Given the need for students with disabilities to acquire citizenship skills similar to those of their peers, the purpose of this study is to explore and describe the understanding of selected civic competencies found in students of inclusive social studies classes and how they acquired this understanding. To fulfill this purpose, two goals drove the study. First, the study explored whether or not the level of understanding is significantly similar between students with disabilities and general education students in inclusive classrooms, thus supporting the philosophical underpinnings of inclusion in a democratic society. Second, the study describes the sources responsible for student understanding of these civic competencies with the goal of determining similarities and differences in these students' sources of knowledge.

Context of the Study

More and more, students with disabilities receive a majority of their formal education in general education settings (Kauffman, 1999; Simpson, 1999; Walker, in press). The rationale for inclusion is both legal and practical. Proponents of inclusive education insist that a proper interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment right to an education implies that this education be delivered in the regular education classroom. In addition, these advocates suggest that general education classrooms resemble the real world more closely than do segregated environments (Danforth & Rhodes, 1997; Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). In

the social studies, where education for civic competency is a common thread among disparate definitions, the rationale for including students with disabilities consists primarily of philosophical arguments on the nature of a democratic society (Rocha & Sanford, 1979; Shaver & Curtis, 1996).

Little is currently known regarding the acquisition and understanding of these skills for children with disabilities in inclusive social studies classrooms. Shaver and Curtis (1996) cited early studies by Stoakes (1964) and Stroud (1976) that suggested support for including mildly disabled students in general education classes. On the other hand, a series of investigations reported in the mid-1980s indicated that children with mild disabilities did not fare better in special education settings than did students included in general education classes (Michaelis, 1992). In any case, there is little that we know about the functioning of these students given the current emphasis and push toward inclusion. Even the results of the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress civics assessment does not disaggregate data on students with disabilities (NAEP, 1999). As Shaver and Curtis (1996) noted, "there is not sufficient empirical evidence in social studies to argue the pedagogical advantages of mainstreamed over segregated settings" (p. 290).

Given the legal and philosophical impetus for inclusion and the dearth of empirical evidence supporting such programs, the context of this study stems from the "equal-expectations principle." Shaver and Curtis (1996) define this principle as the expectation that "disabled students will leave school to participate in a

community that consists largely of 'normal functioning' individuals. Should these students not be held to the highest standards they can achieve in preparation for assuming adult roles in the community" (p. 293)? Based on the ultimate goal of inclusion to prepare students for equal expectations as participants in a democratic society, the comparison of non-disabled to disabled students on measures of civic competence and self-reported sources of knowledge formed the context of this study.

If, indeed, inclusion in the formal curriculum assists those with mild disabilities to achieve civic competency on a significant par with non-disabled students, then educational policy makers and social studies educators should be made aware of these findings. Additionally, the latent and extra curricula that surround a student's formal education may contribute to the level of civic competence in all students. If these curricula do contribute, the need to discern any differences or to discover any similarities between non-disabled and disabled students would also contribute to both policy decisions and the social studies teacher education literature. Finally, sources of knowledge and understanding that move disabled and general education students together toward the achievement of civic competency hold potential significance for social studies teachers faced with inclusive classes. Describing sources that differentiate general education and disabled students in these classrooms would serve a similar purpose.

Method

The first objective of this study was to measure directly the level of civic

competence of students with disabilities in general education classrooms and to compute across-group comparisons. The second objective of this study was to obtain information on the sources of understanding held by all students regarding civic competencies.

In order to fulfill the first objective, a basis of comparison was developed for levels of civic competency acquired by general education students and students with disabilities who are normally included in general education classes (i.e., students with learning disabilities, mild mental disabilities, or behavioral disorders). This basis of comparison was achieved through a test of civic competencies. The second objective was met through a descriptive analysis of students' self-reported sources for understanding civic competencies.

Participants

Participants in this study included 32 students with disabilities (6.3%) and 474 general education students (93.4%), all of whom attended three high schools in the state of Iowa. Although these percentages do not reflect national populations, nor even populations within the state of Iowa, this study included only those students who were present in inclusive classrooms. Thus, self-contained classrooms were not part of the study, and absenteeism accounted for a decrease in students with disabilities on testing days. Nonetheless, when adjusted for students in self-contained classrooms and for absenteeism, these percentages reflect the national and state averages of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

These students attended three high schools in rural, semi-urban, and urban communities located in Iowa. We administered the test instrument during class periods that ranged from 45 minutes to 50 minutes in length. Small group interviews took place following the administration of the test, and they lasted approximately 20 minutes. All data were gathered one week prior to the completion of the students' secondary education. Therefore, the participants were mostly high school seniors, and they represented adolescents who were about to enter or had recently entered the "adult world" of citizenship that comes with one's eighteenth birthday.

Test of Civic Competencies

Two forms of data were gathered for this study. First, the commonly designated civic competencies needed to function in a democratic society formed the basis of the written test for quantitative analysis. Test items stemmed from the Basic Civic Competencies Project (Remy, 1979) and Hartoonian's (1985) 15-point set of guidelines for the enlightened citizen. The first National Assessment of Educational Progress civics assessment (NAEP, 1990), the second National Assessment of Educational Progress civics framework (National Assessment Governing Board, 1996), and the most recent version of the Iowa Test of Educational Development (Feldt, et al., 1993) guided test item construction.

In all, three civic competencies, as well as basic knowledge questions, formed the basis of the test. Although Remy and Hartoonian list a total of 22 civic competencies, of which some overlap, the reality exists that many of these

competencies cannot be tested via a pencil and paper instrument (Remy, 1979). Consequently, the instrument consisted of testable items that fell into the following competencies:

1. Acquiring and using information. This competency involves the ability to acquire and process data on politically-based situations. (14 items)

2. Assessing involvement. This competency entails a person's ability to gauge his/her necessary level of involvement and stake in various political situations, including making a decision on an issue or a policy. (14 items)

3. Promoting one's interests. This competency focuses on a person's ability to utilize the political system so as to promote and protect his/her public and private rights and interests. (8 items)

Additionally, ten questions dealt with basic knowledge concerning government officials on the federal and state level, for a total of 46 test items.

The final six items of the instrument asked the students to self-report descriptive data. These data included gender, age, race, whether or not the student had a disability, and the type of disability. In all, fifty-two items appeared on the test.

Posttest Interviews

A second set of qualitative data were gathered for this study. Small group, posttest interviews sought the sources of these students' understanding of civic competencies. The interviews, conducted with four students from each classroom tested, began with the following grand tour question: "How did you know the

answers on the test of civic competencies? In other words, where did you get the knowledge to answer the questions?" Each interview diverged in directions dictated by student answers to the grand tour question. The students who participated in these group interviews were chosen randomly by the teacher of each class with one exception in each group of four. The researchers requested that at least one student with a disability be included in the group. Interviewers conducted 26 small group interviews with a total of 104 students.

These data served as the basis of descriptive analysis to gain not only a richer understanding of student competency levels, but also to determine key sources for acquiring civic competency--such as the formal curriculum, participation in extracurricular activities, mass media, peer association, and family life--that may influence differentially students with and without disabilities.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data obtained in this investigation were analyzed in four ways. First, a descriptive analysis was conducted to provide an initial explanation of the results obtained by the test of civic competencies. This analysis included distribution across types of disabilities and ethnicity, as well as means for total scores on the test across groups. Second, a 4 x 2 (ethnicity x disability) factorial analysis of variance (Ferguson, 1976) was used to evaluate total scores on the test of civic competency. Third, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to determine differences between groups with and without disabilities across areas of the three competencies and basic knowledge. A .05 level of significance was

adopted prior to the analysis of data. Finally, descriptive analysis of posttest interviews sought to uncover students' self-reported sources for understanding civic competencies.

Experimental Findings

General education students made up 93.4% of the study population (N = 474), while the students with disabilities were 6.3% (N = 32) of the population. The distribution of students across disability areas was as follows: 8.6% speech and language disorders (N = 3), 65.7% learning disabilities (N = 23), 2.9% emotional and behavioral disorders (N = 1), 2.9% physical disabilities (N = 1) , and 20% other disabilities (N = 7). The ethnic distribution across the entire subject population was White (84.7%, N= 426), Hispanic (10.3%, N= 52), African American (1.8%, N= 9), Asian American (3%, N= 15), and Native American (.2%, N= 1). Gender representation was 47.4% male (N = 240) and 51.8% female (N = 266). Seniors in high school made up 96.8% of the subject population.

Test scores ranged from 12 to 46 for all subjects, and the total mean test score for all subjects was 35.04 (SD = 6.04). The mean score for students with disabilities was 30.28 (SD = 8.42) and 35.36 (SD = 5.72) for general education students. Figure 1 provides graphic representation of test scores for the students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Mean test scores across ethnic groups were as follows: White (35.81), African American (33.55), Asian American (32.80), Hispanic American (29.83), and Native American (29.00).

Insert Figure 1 Approximately Here

In order to determine any difference in the civic competency between high school-aged children, scores on the test of civic competency were analyzed by means of a 4 x 2 (ethnicity x disability) factorial analysis of variance. A harmonic mean solution was employed in conjunction with the two-way ANOVA to adjust for unequal cell sizes. This analysis indicates no significant intraction between the two factors. The results of the ANOVA are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of Variance for Test of Civic Competency

Source of Variance	Sums of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	P
A (Disability)	462.99	1	462.99	14.40	.00
B (Ethnicity)	860.92	3	286.97	8.92	.00
A x B	177.10	3	59.03	1.83	.14
Error	15879.90	494	32.14		
Total	635276.00	502			

Factor A refers to the main effect of disability (see Table 1). Variable B refers to the ethnicity main effect for the subjects. Condition A x B refers to the disability by ethnicity interaction. Analysis of the main effect for disability (A) indicates a statistically significant difference between subjects with disabilities

and their typically developing peers ($F = 14.40$, $p = .00$). This finding indicates that the scores on the test of civic competency for students with disabilities ($M = 30.28$) were significantly lower than those of the nondisabled subjects ($M = 35.36$).

Factor B refers to the main effect of ethnicity. Analysis of this main effect indicates a statistically significant difference between the performance of different ethnic groups ($F = 8.93$, $p = .00$). A post-hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD revealed that there was a significant difference between White students and Hispanic students, with a mean difference of 5.98 ($p = .00$). There were no significant differences between any of the other ethnic group contrasts on test score results.

Analyses were also conducted across the following four competency areas: acquiring and using information, assessing involvement, promoting one's interest, and basic knowledge. Data regarding means and standard deviations across these competencies are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for competency areas.

Subjects	Acquiring, Using Information	Assessing Involvement	Promoting Interest	Basic
Disabled:				
Mean	53.78	72.84	76.00	65.00
(SD)	(23.40)	(18.26)	(19.25)	(24.23)
Nondisabled:				
Mean	75.50	81.52	82.35	72.46
(SD)	(17.50)	(10.51)	(18.10)	(20.39)
Total:				
Mean	71.32	80.97	81.94	71.99
(SD)	(18.47)	(11.33)	(18.19)	(20.70)

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine differences between subjects with and without disabilities on each of the three competencies and basic knowledge. A Hoelling's Trace F-Test shows a significant difference across groups ($p = .00$). Tests of between-subjects effects, shown in Table 3, present significant differences between disabled and general education students in 1. Acquiring and Using Information ($F = 32.72$, $p = .00$), 2. Assessing Involvement ($F = 18.18$, $p = .00$), and 4. Basic Information ($F = 3.92$, $p = .048$). No differences between disabled and nondisabled students were found for 3. Promoting One's Interest.

Table 3. Multivariate analysis of variance across competency factors.

Source	Dependent Variable	Sums of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Disabled/	1	10505.81	1	10505.81	32.72	.000
Non-	2	2256.01	1	2256.01	18.18	.000
disabled	3	1207.19	1	1207.19	3.67	.056
	4	1671.97	1	1671.97	3.92	.048
Error	1	161835.97	504	321.10		
	2	62556.54	504	124.12		
	3	165921.26	504	329.21		
	4	214812.02	504	426.21		
Total	1	2746001.00	506			
	2	3382249.00	506			
	3	3564882.00	506			
	4	2839300.00	506			

Posttest Interviews

Researchers conducted posttest interviews with 26 groups of 4 students. Every group included at least one student with a disability. The teachers in each class period where students were tested and interviewed chose the four students for each interview. Interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. Each interview was recorded on audio tape, and field notes were collected simultaneously. The central, grand tour question that guided the interviews was "How did you know the answers on the test of civic competencies? In other words, where did you get the knowledge to answer the questions?"

Interview transcripts were analyzed for purposes of finding out the sources from which students drew in order to answer the questions on the test of civic competencies. Three categories of sources emerged through a descriptive analysis of the data that was developed through a constant comparison of cases (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and comparative pattern analysis (Guba, 1978). The most emergent, influential categories or sources of knowledge for civic competency included the school curriculum, parents, and peers.

Surprisingly, there was no discernible difference between the responses rendered by disabled students and their non-disables peers. This is a possible disadvantage with group interviews in that they may allow the "emerging group culture [to] interfere with individual expression" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 365). However, as noted by Fontana and Frey (1994), group interviews are also "data rich, flexible, stimulating to the respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative and elaborative, over and above individual responses" (p. 365). Given this tradeoff, group interviews were chosen for gathering information on the sources of knowledge on civic competency because a great number of students (fully 20% of the population) would be heard.

The Curriculum as a Source of Facts. Students tended to identify the curriculum as the most significant influence on their learning of fact-related civic information (e.g., questions concerning who passes a law and who has the Constitutional power to tax). Referencing a class in law, one student conveyed that he learned a lot of fact-oriented civic questions asked on the test in his social

studies classes. When asked about where she received most of her information to answer the questions on the test, another student responded, "Most of the stuff about the government aspect and knowing the different branches of government came from government class this (her senior) year." In a different interview, a student responded in a similar way: "Some of what was asked was learned here in our government class, such as the legislative, executive, and judicial information. All of that stuff was here in class."

Not only was the curriculum singled out as the source of factual information, students considered it a reliable source. Having been asked about who she would approach first with a question regarding civic-oriented information, one female student echoed the sentiment of many others: "I would go to my teachers. I mean I have my parents, but if I wanted more factual information, I would go to my teachers."

When asked to compare the influences of peers and school, a student remarked that "on current issues, I would put my peers above school, but on book issues they would not be above school. I mean, we don't sit around and talk about government." Thus, students experiences with the curriculum and schooling appeared to help prepare them for much of the foundational, factual information associated with being a competent citizen.

Parents as a Source of Understanding. Many students identified their parents as an important influence on their learning, but had difficulty in specifying how. Some students watch the news with their parents, but they did not indicate

how this contributed to the learning of civic competencies. Many students who felt emotionally connected to their parents felt especially compelled to cite their parents as the chief sources of influence on their civic competencies. The following response from a mildly disables student echoed this sentiment: "I would go more to my parents, but I think that's because of the way I was raised. Our whole family has always been close. I would just be prone to go talk to my parents than anyone else."

Students who indicated that they came from politically active households also felt that their family influenced them a great deal. Two students noted that their families prioritized an awareness of politics through dinner conversations or by watching the news together. One student stated that her frequent trips with her father to city council meetings taught her a lot about civic competencies needed to promote one's self-interests. Overall, between both disabled and general education students, there was a positive correlation between a family's level of political involvement and the perceived level of influence the family had on the student's civic competencies.

Peers as a Source of Behavior. Unlike the facts taught via the curriculum or the "understanding" promoted through the family, peers acted in a much different way as a source of civic competency. Overall, students indicated that their peer groups might discuss issues such as "taxes, abortion, driving curfews, or no tolerance," but regarding the more "adult issues," students claimed that peers "are just not that interested or do not have the information to have an influence on

me." When one student was asked about the influence of his peers on his civic competencies, he noted that they were "not necessarily important on political stuff. I mean a lot of the stuff has to do with political things and the way the government is set up. But when I'm with my friends, we don't usually talk about the government." Students claimed that teachers or parents would be more inclined to answer questions dealing with these constitutional or governmental issues.

However, many of the students felt as though their friends helped them to learn civic behaviors they felt critical to being a competent citizen. One student commented, "It is a lot easier to get involved if you have a group of friends to get involved with." In many cases, students felt that both inside and outside their peer groups, they learned "what not to do," alluding to the fact that some of their peers are apathetic about civic involvement or even have experienced difficulty in following the laws.

In witnessing these attributes in their classmates, the students claimed to have learned a lot about how to act in this society. Given the unique role school usually plays in bringing a multitude of different types of students together in one setting, students also felt that they have been influenced by their social interaction with their peers. As one student summarized:

> I think a lot of what anybody is going to learn about social interaction is going to come from school. You learn a lot about who you want to be and then who you don't want to be like, and you learn from other people's

> mistakes and other people's views on things. But a lot of the social interaction that you learn about in being with other people you pick up in high school.

Thus, learning how to act as an active, responsible citizen was gained mainly from the students' peer groups.

Implications

The 1997 re-authorization of IDEA implies that inclusion is the most appropriate educational approach for some students with disabilities to learn competencies necessary for life in a democracy. This study sought to determine whether or not the inclusion of disabled students into the general education curriculum actually supported this notion.

First, the findings indicated that students with disabilities did not fare as well as their general education peers on a test of civic competencies. However, on the questions from the test that dealt specifically with the promotion of one's own interests, there was no significant difference. Second, Hispanic students, when compared to white students, comprised the only ethnic group to show a significantly lower understanding of civic competencies as per the test of civic competencies. Finally, when asked how they knew what they knew in order to answer the questions on the test, three sources of knowledge (the curriculum, parents, and peers) emerged as similar for all groups of students.

Given these three majors findings, implications warranted from the evidence include the following. First, the difference between scores obtained

from disabled students and non-disabled students indicates that "equal expectations" are not being achieved in these three high schools. This finding does not imply that the inclusion of mildly disabled students into the general education curriculum is less appropriate for the preparation of these students for life in a democracy because this study included no implementation and assessment of an alternative treatment. However, this finding does imply that the development and testing of alternative instructional means for teaching of civic competencies in the inclusive classroom should become a priority for social studies and special education teachers and researchers. The possibility exists that simply infusing students with mild disabilities into the general education curriculum, without some adjustment of that curriculum, is not the most appropriate approach to developing competent citizens through inclusion.

The only test items that indicated no difference between disabled and non-disabled students were those that addressed promotion of one's self-interests. This finding indicates that students with or without mild disabilities seem to understand how to protect their public and private rights and interests within the parameters of the political system. If students with and without mild disabilities are able to promote their self-interests, then the implication that further research into why this is the case may reveal sources and strategies for curriculum development aimed at teaching the other, much less equal civic competencies.

Second, given that Hispanic students make up a disproportionate segment of the disabled student population, these findings imply that teaching civic

competencies to this ethnic group may require special curricular attention. In other words, Hispanic Americans did not fare as well as African American and Asian American minority students in this study. The small numbers of these other minority groups in this study may not indicate the degree to which each of them may require different curricular treatment from their white majority peers. However, the findings do imply that in the finite area of civic competencies, Hispanic students lag behind white students at a level comparable to all mildly disabled students.

Third, the sources of knowledge garnered from the student interviews indicated that both inclusive students and general education students find their knowledge of civic competencies in the same places: the curriculum, parents, and peers. However, the "equal-expectations principle" (Curtis and Shaver, 1996) indicates that if the sources are the same, then logically the outcomes should be significantly similar. In this study, they are only significantly similar on one competency. This finding implies that inclusion into the general education curriculum does not necessarily address the knowledge base of disabled students as well as it does for non-disabled students. Additionally, the assumption that equal treatment will result in similar outcomes does not seem to hold in this study. The implication of this finding, similar to the first implication noted above, is that more research, development, and testing of instructional treatment for mildly disabled students needs to take place in order for these students to put their knowledge base for civic competency to its optimum use. This implication puts

into question the value of inclusion with no curricular adjustment for the development of civic competencies in mildly disabled students.

Conclusion

This study addressed two questions concerning mildly disabled students and their general education peers as they enter the "adult world" of citizenship. First, is the level of understanding significantly similar between students with disabilities and general education students in inclusive classrooms? Second, what are the sources of knowledge concerning civic competencies for both mildly disabled and general education students? In order to get at the first question, a test of civic competencies was developed that focused on three "testable" competencies and general knowledge about politics and government. Small group interviews attended to the second question.

Three key findings emerged from this study. First, on only one competency did the mildly disabled and general education students show significantly similar understanding. Overall, mildly disabled students were less successful on the test of civic competencies. Second, Hispanic students mirrored the results of disabled students on the test instrument. Third, interview data indicated that all students gained their knowledge of civic competencies from three sources: the curriculum, their parents, and their peers.

Each of these findings in some way implied a need to go beyond the rhetoric that equates inclusion with democracy to a systematic development of instructional innovations that help students with mild disabilities to leave school

with certain civic competencies at a level significantly similar to their general education peers. Until all conceivable approaches have been exhausted, we cannot assume that the noble quest for democracy through the inclusive classroom is necessarily the most appropriate method by which mildly disabled students will understand and achieve the highest standards of participation necessary to live in a democratic society.

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Figure 1. Graphic representation of test scores for students with and without disabilities.